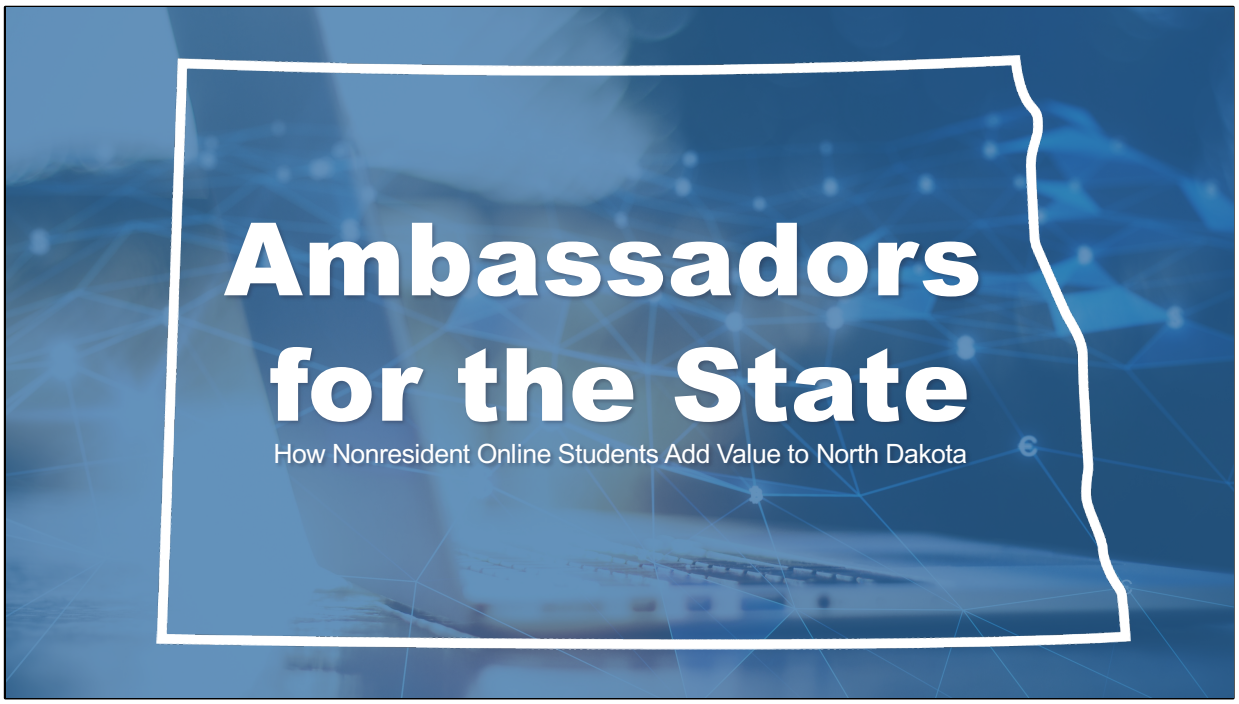
Ambassadors for the state: How nonresident online students add value to North Dakota





North Dakota is currently facing two significant demographic challenges that directly impact its economic and educational landscape.

First, the state has an exceptionally low unemployment rate of 2.5%, indicating that nearly everyone who wants to work is already employed. This creates a pressing need for additional workforce members to sustain and grow the economy.

Second, the state's higher education system is heavily reliant on students from other states. Other states will continue to get more aggressive in recruiting our students to offset their high school graduation declines occurring before ND's high school graduation rates decline in the mid-2030s.

These demographic realities underscore the importance of innovative solutions to attract and retain talent in North Dakota.

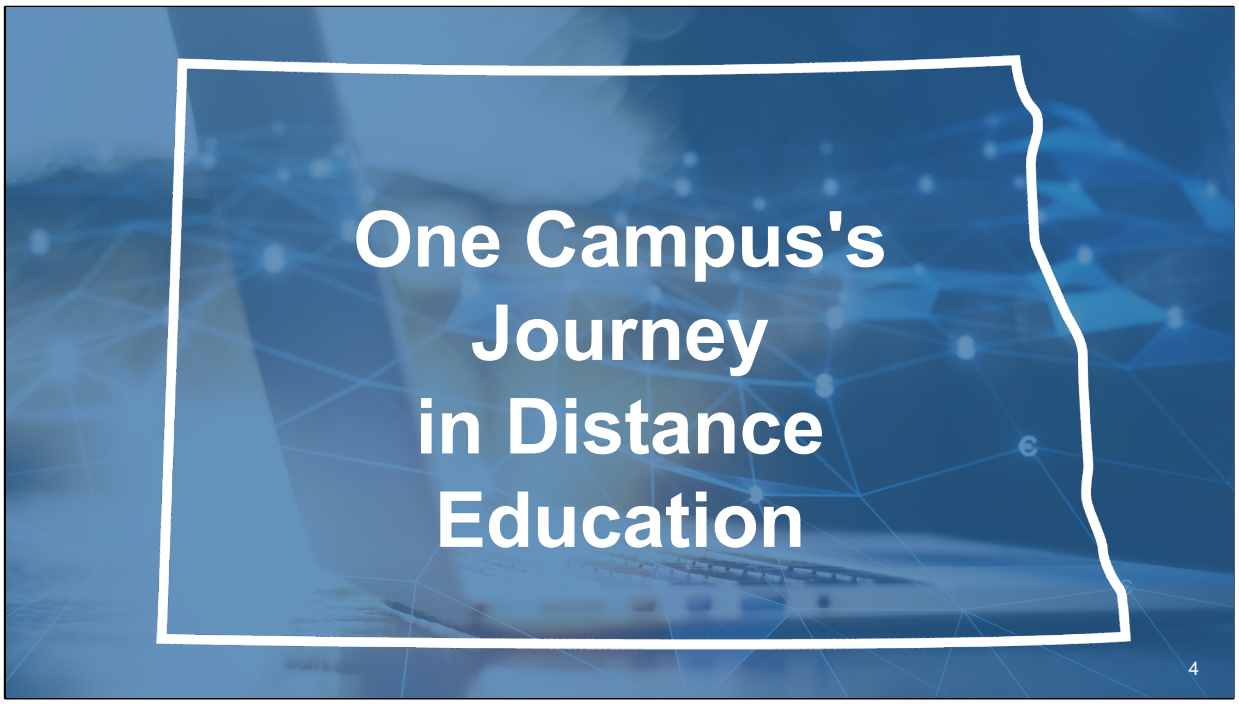


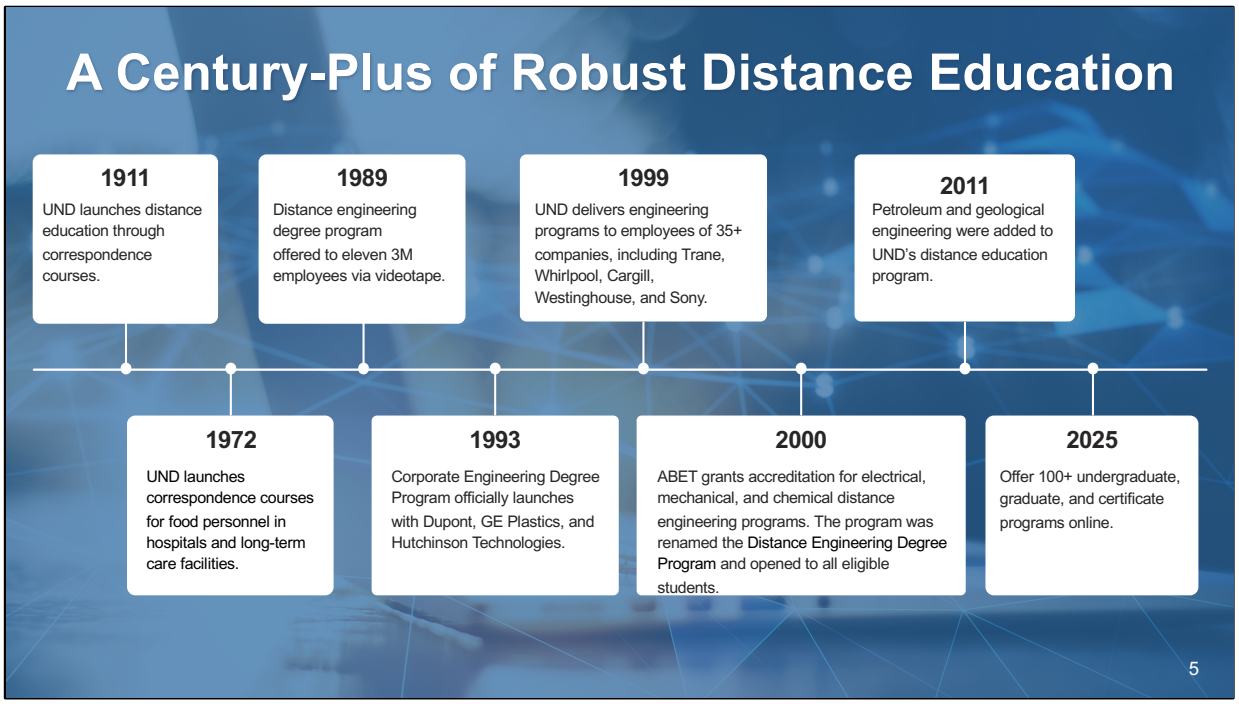
Online education, including programs that attract nonresident as well as resident students, **offers a cost-effective and scalable solution to North Dakota's demographic and workforce challenges**.

By expanding access to higher education beyond the state, ND competes in the growing national trend of students who are seeking flexible, high-quality academic programs. This approach not only brings in tuition revenue from out-of-state learners, but also introduces potential new residents to the state's educational and professional opportunities.

A strong online program mix allows ND institutions to serve a diverse student body, including working adults, rural learners, and military-affiliated individuals who might not otherwise be able to pursue a degree. **These programs help maintain the viability of academic offerings, support faculty and infrastructure, and ensure that both in-state and out-of-state students benefit from robust educational experiences.**

Ultimately, online education serves as a **strategic tool for workforce development, economic growth, and population stabilization** in North Dakota.


One Campus's Journey in Distance Education
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UND has a long and distinguished history of innovation in distance and online education. This legacy dates back to 1911, when UND President Frank L. McVey emphasized the importance of extending educational opportunities beyond the campus, and the University began offering correspondence courses. We have capitalized on what we have learned and expanded our offerings, evolving into the **leader in online education** for the Midwest.

In 1972, UND began providing correspondence courses for food service personnel in hospitals and long-term care facilities, laying the groundwork for today's nationally recognized online Dietary Manager Program. Since 2021, **36% of all U.S. Certified Dietary Manager exam takers nationwide** have been graduates of the UND program.

By 1988, UND was collaborating with major corporations like 3M to deliver engineering courses via videotape, and by 1999, we were serving **over 35 companies,** including Trane Company, Whirlpool Corporation, Cargill, Westinghouse, and Sony.

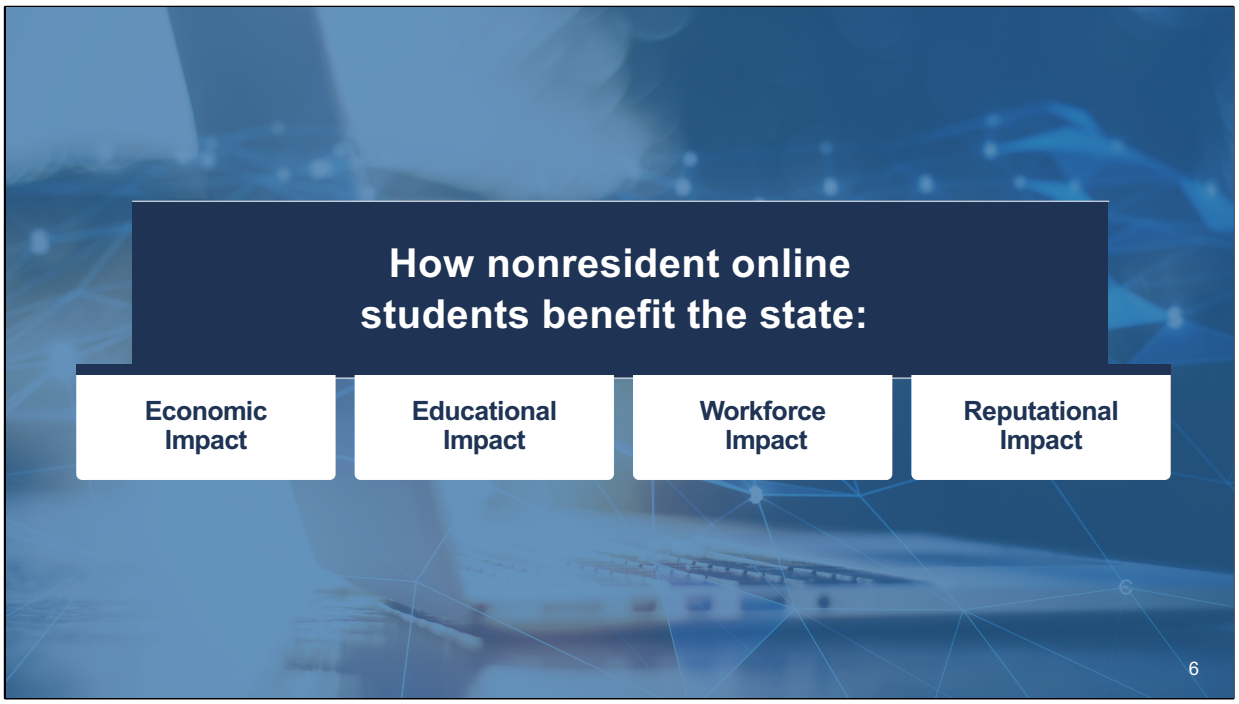
In 2000, **accreditation was granted by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) for Electrical, Mechanical, and Chemical Engineering distance degree programs.** In 2005, Civil Engineering was added, and in 2011, Petroleum and Geological Engineering were also added to the ABET-accredited Distance Education programs at UND. **As of 2005, UND was the only identified ABET accredited online distance engineering degree program in the country.**

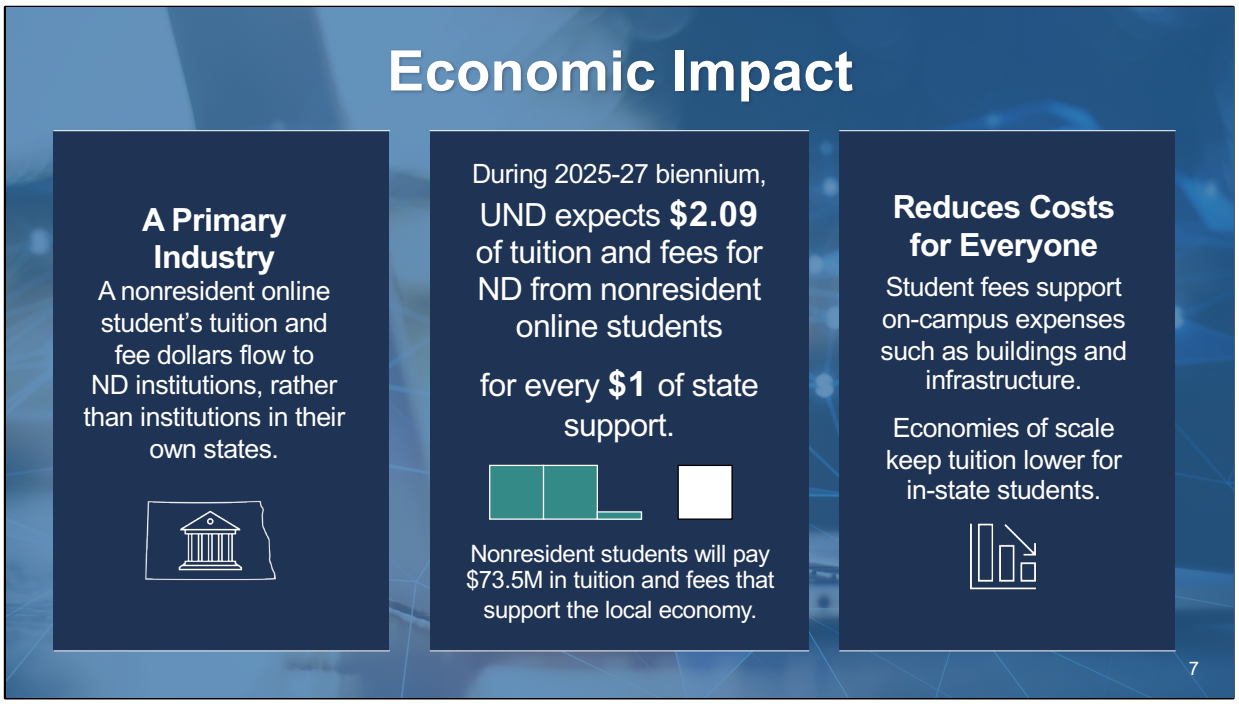
Today, there are fewer than 40 ABET accredited online engineering programs nationally. UND's Biomedical Engineering and Electrical Engineering programs are the only bachelor programs offered 100% online (per the ABET website).

All other UND engineering programs require an on-campus component, bringing students from all over the country to ND for some portion of the degree requirement.

As of 2025, UND has a diversified program mix of online degrees including multiple engineering programs (as well as Business, Education, Social Work, and many more). As a result, UND has significant national recognition and strong brand awareness nationally for our engineering programs.

Engineers are crucial to the energy workforce, and our national reputation, along with BSC's reputation in online energy programs, helps local as well as national employers in the state recruit and retain talent.


How nonresident online students benefit the state:
Economic Impact
Educational Impact
Workforce Impact
Reputational Impact
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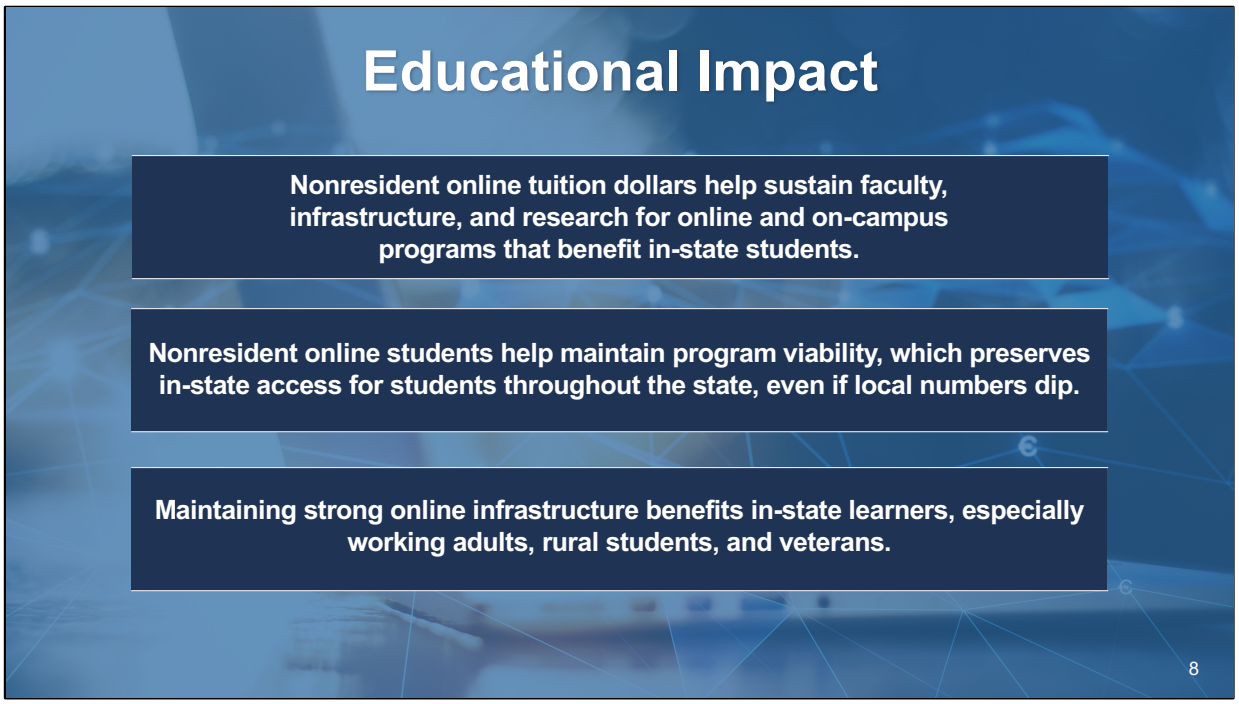
Nonresident online students are a primary industry
Just like North Dakota grows wheat and produces oil, and sells those products to out-of-state consumers, the NDUS produces and sells online courses. When nonresident online students buy those courses, their tuition and fee dollars flow directly to North Dakota institutions rather than institutions in other states.

Return on Investment
As of fiscal year 2026, UND expects to bring into North Dakota **$2.09 in tuition and fees from online out-of-state students, for every $1 of state support provided.** This is an exceptional ROI for the state, exceeding even returns on the Challenge grants.

During the 2025-27 biennium, online out-of-state students are expected to contribute $73.5 million in tuition and fees. This revenue supports faculty salaries, infrastructure, and student services, and also contributes to the local economy through spending by staff and faculty. These dollars are spent on housing, dining, entertainment, and related expenses in the local communities, then circulate due to the well-known "multiplier" effect.

In addition, these dollars generate state income tax revenue for ND.

Reduces cost for on-campus students
Additionally, nonresident online students help reduce the cost burden for on-campus students by contributing to the debt service and infrastructure expenditures for campus buildings. Their enrollment ensures that more programs can be offered and sustained, benefitting all students. Due to the economies of scale that exist by having more students, tuition and appropriated revenue benefit both online and on-campus programs and students. If there were fewer students, the cost per student would increase, and fewer programs and opportunities would be available for all students.

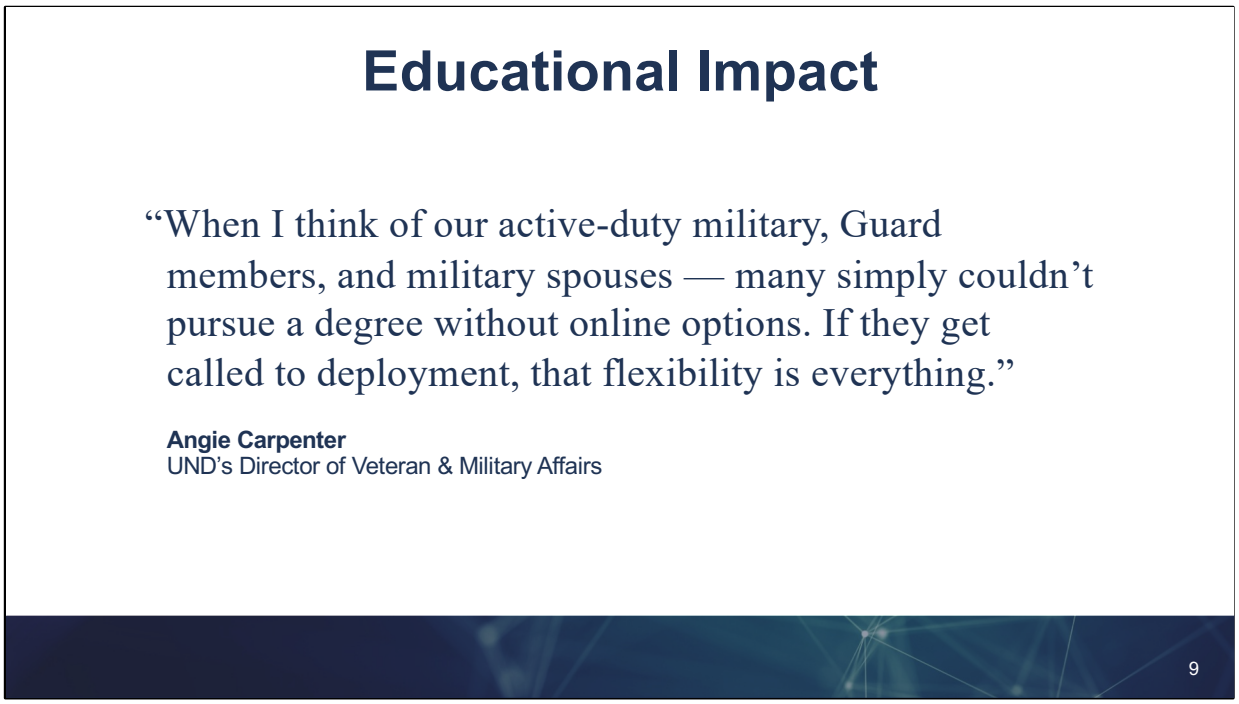


Nonresident tuition dollars help sustain faculty positions, research initiatives, and infrastructure, which, in turn, benefits in-state students.

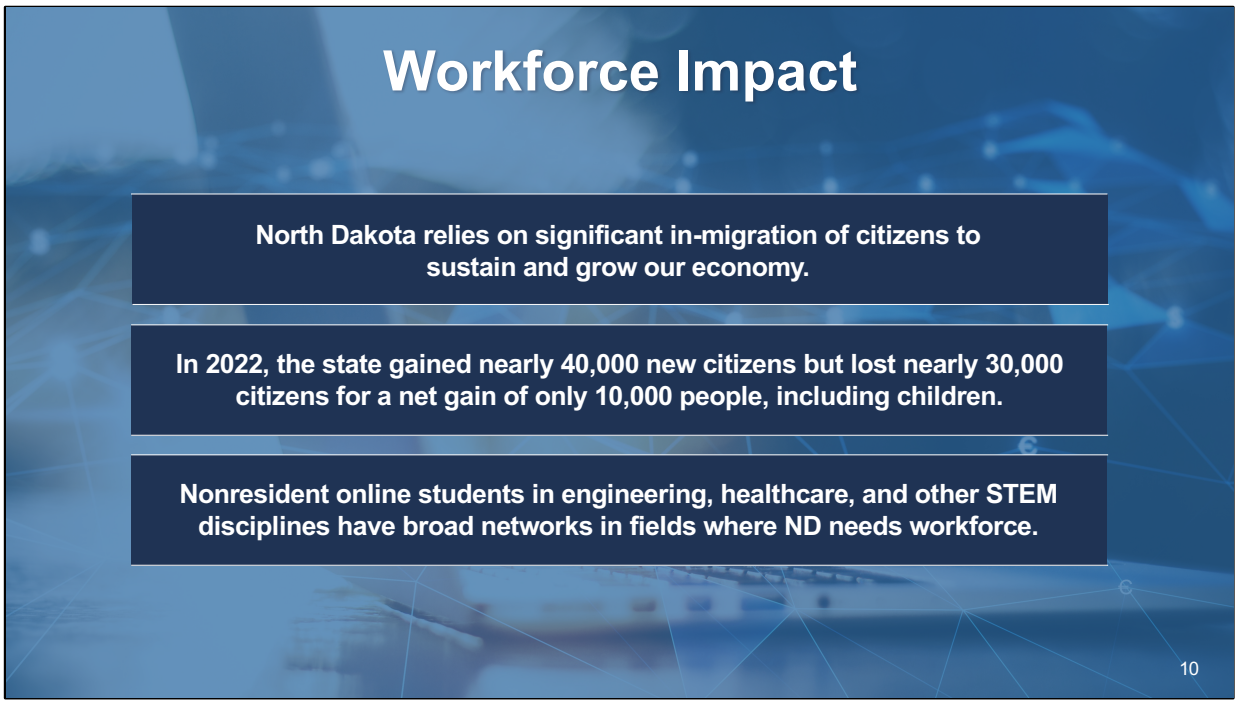
Nonresident online students enhance the educational landscape of North Dakota by supporting the viability of academic programs across North Dakota. This ensures that offerings remain available even when local enrollment dips. Online enrollment from out-of-state helps the NDUS stay future-ready and relevant, benefiting all students (including North Dakota residents) by keeping our institutions strong.

In other words, supporting out-of-state online enrollment doesn't mean in-state students lose out. Just the opposite: **Maintaining strong online infrastructure benefits in-state learners, especially our working adults, rural students, and veterans — who make up a big share of online learners.**

UND Online graduates can be found in 50 North Dakota counties, 170 North Dakota cities, and both North Dakota Air Force Bases.



Nearly **half of UND's 2,000+ military-affiliated students study online,** and many would be unable to pursue degrees without this flexibility.



North Dakota needs on-campus graduates to stay in the state. Likewise, we rely significantly on the in-migration of workforce to sustain and grow our economy.

The most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics data (2022) shows North Dakota received 39,569 new residents and lost 29,191 residents in the same year for a net of 10,378 new residents. This census information includes children, so it does not directly translate to workforce.

North Dakota will need to increase its overall in-migration of citizens to offset the large number of retiring workers, and although North Dakota does not expect to see immediate declines in the number of high school students, the declines will begin over the next decade.

So, who will spread the good word nationwide about North Dakota?

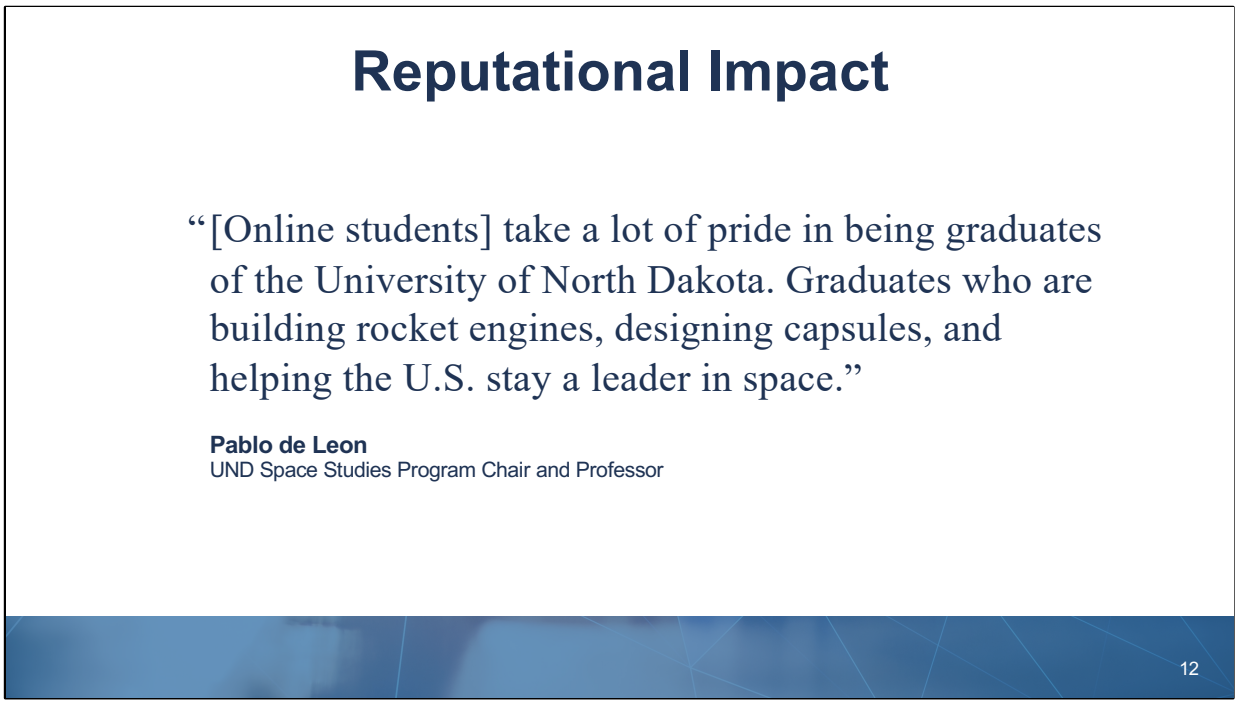
- **Answer: Ambassadors for the State.** Nonresident online students — professionals who live all over the country, are grateful for and affectionate toward North Dakota and are happy to talk up the state to their friends, families and colleagues.
- Cost-effective marketing: Online students extend North Dakota's reach, reputation and prestige far beyond state lines. This **Positive Exposure is VITAL** for attracting the new residents North Dakota needs
- Economic diversification: Nonresident online graduates/ambassadors in engineering, healthcare and other STEM fields have wide networks in the fields in which North Dakota needs workforce.
- Nonresident students enable current NDUS workforce programs to continue by providing **"critical mass"**
    - The students' numbers and tuition dollars support ALL NDUS programs.
    - Strong online programs have allowed UND to forge exceptional partnerships.



Many of these exceptional partnerships are with regional employers, many of which are also national in scope. **Here are a few companies with nonresident online student employees.**

Additionally, partnerships with companies such as Digi-Key enable employees to earn online degrees in fields such as electrical engineering and computer science. Digi-Key, a multibillion-dollar electronics distributor in Thief River Falls, Minn., employs more than 4,000 people — many of whom commute daily from North Dakota cities.

These collaborations allow employees to earn degrees while working, thereby strengthening the talent pipeline in critical industries.



The success of nonresident online students significantly enhances North Dakota's reputation on a national and global scale.

Space Studies is one of UND's most visible programs worldwide, and it's also a central factor in the diversification of North Dakota's economy to now include national security.

Space Studies is also a program in which about 90 percent of students study online.

Professor and Program Chair Pablo de Leon recently attended an alumni event in Seattle, where he met many proud online graduates who, he said, "take a lot of pride in being graduates of the University of North Dakota."

De Leon said he can't envision the same caliber of program being offered without an online component. He added that he often meets UND alumni at NASA centers and private companies, including Blue Origin. These are "graduates who are building rocket engines, designing capsules, and helping the U.S. stay a leader in space," he said.

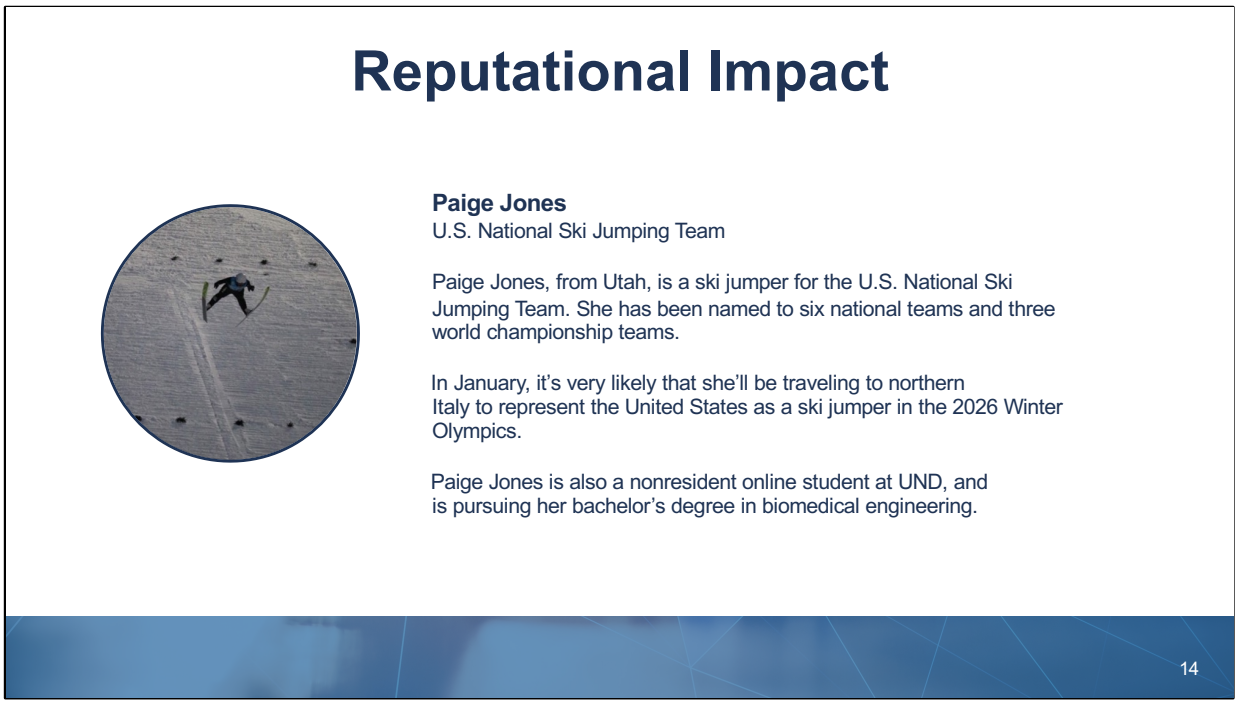
In Space Studies and other national-security fields, **North Dakota's online programs have populated corporations and federal agencies with hundreds or even thousands of working professionals who've graduated from NDUS institutions**. Those multiple points of contact make it much easier for North Dakota researchers to compete for and win grants.



In 2022, Sara Sabry made history by becoming the first Egyptian, first African woman, and first Arab woman to travel into space. She is a Space for Humanity Citizen Astronaut, a winner of the Emerging Space Leader Award from the International Astronautical Federation, a co-founder of the Deep Space Initiative nonprofit to increase access to the space industry, and an internationally known speaker.

She is also a nonresident online student at UND, taking classes in pursuit of her doctoral degree in aerospace sciences.

Watch Sara tell her own story: Sara Sabry: Space Traveler and Advocate for Space Accessibility.



Paige Jones, from Utah, is a ski jumper for the U.S. National Ski Jumping Team. She has been named to six national teams and three world championship teams.

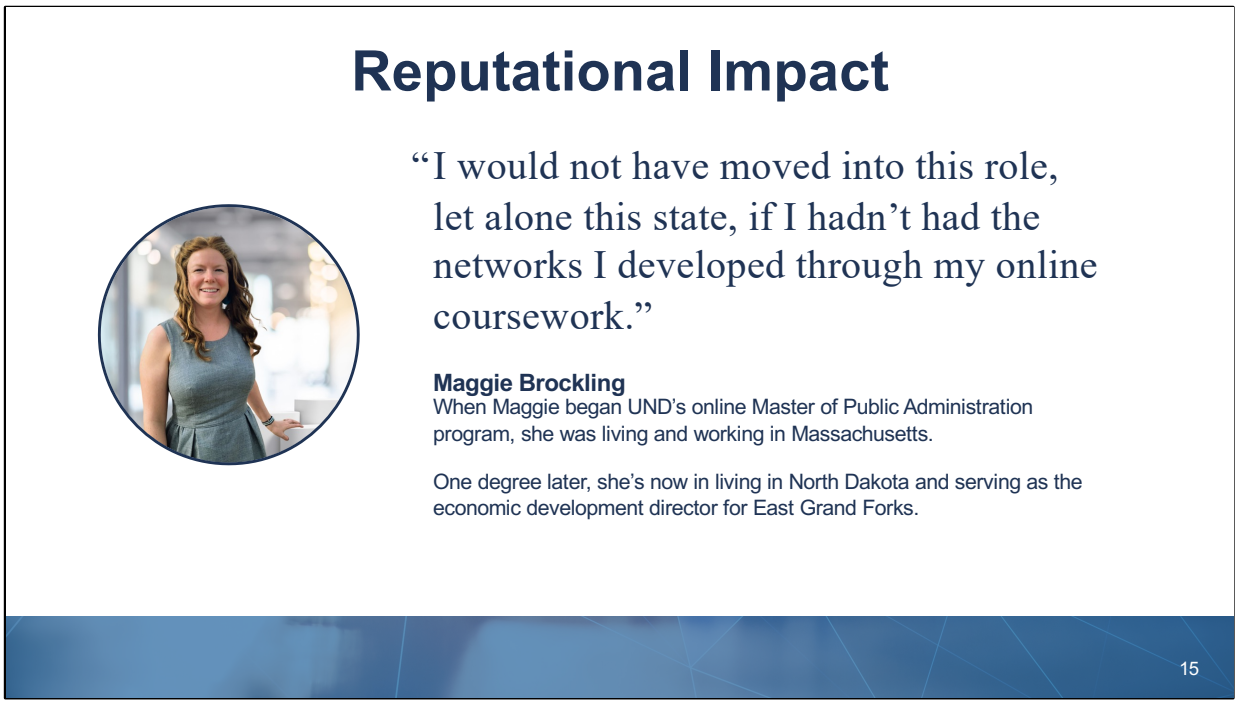
In January, it's very likely that she'll be traveling to northern Italy to represent the United States as a ski jumper in the 2026 Winter Olympics.

Paige Jones is also a nonresident online student who is pursuing her bachelor's degree in biomedical engineering at UND.

"I explored a lot of other programs, but ultimately landed on UND for their online biomedical engineering program," Jones stated. "When I transferred, I met with all the biomedical engineering professors. They were excited to have me and saw how my sports background added perspective. What drew me to UND the most was how excited the department seemed to have me in their program."

Visit UND Today to read more about Paige.

These individuals have not only achieved personal success but also serve as ambassadors for the state. Their stories highlight the quality and accessibility of North Dakota's educational offerings and help build connections that can lead to future partnerships and relocations.



How did Maggie get to Grand Forks from Massachusetts?

Through her UND courses, she connected with classmates working in public service across North Dakota and Minnesota. Meanwhile, she'd hit a professional ceiling in Massachusetts, with few leadership opportunities opening up. In contrast, "on my first walk around the Grand Forks community, I learned about all the young people in leadership roles here," she said. "I was like, 'Alright! This is awesome!'"

That move set off a career trajectory that would firmly root her in the Red River Valley.

Brockling first came to Grand Forks to serve as director of Evolve Grand Forks, later joining City Hall in key business development roles before stepping into her current position as East Grand Forks' economic development director. **"I would not have moved into this role, let alone this state, if I hadn't had the networks I developed through my online coursework," she said.**

But even students who don't take that ultimate step of relocating actively contribute to the state and help build our North Dakota workforce through all of the means (tuition-and-fee dollars, etc.) described above, including positive word-of-mouth and North Dakota brand awareness.

Consider Julie Bradley, director of operations for the Georgia Peace Officer Standards & Training Council, former president of the Georgia Internal Affairs Investigators Association, and of the Georgia Public Safety Leadership Institute Advisory Council – and an online graduate of UND's Forensic Psychology master's degree program. "All of that was made possible, in part, by my degree from the University of North Dakota," Bradley wrote to the Provost's Office at UND. "The standards at UND are high. The quality of education is amazing. That is where I wanted my degree from, so that is what I made happen. And I would do it again to be accepted to UND ... What I have written comes from such a place of gratitude and affection. I love UND!"



The NDUS is committed to researching the collection of more data on our online students to respond to requests from legislators and other stakeholders. The Commissioner has appointed a representative group of institutional members to provide recommendations to collect and report this information in the future.

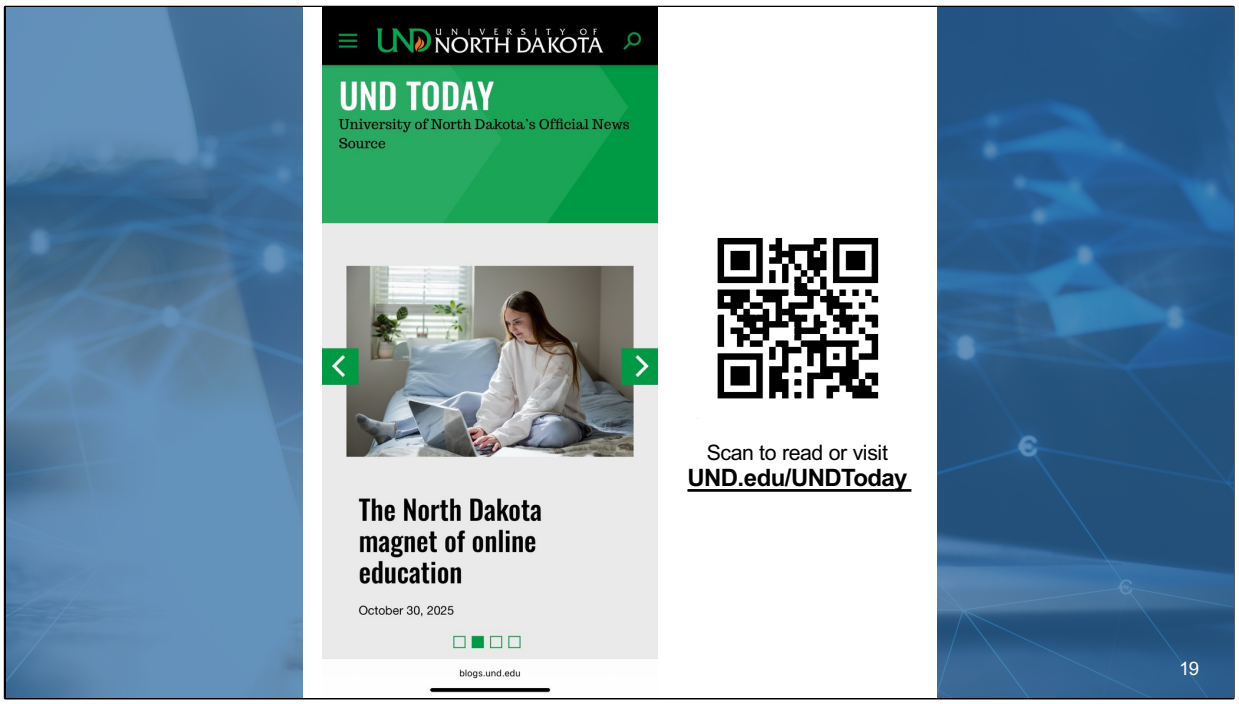
A sustained commitment to online education for all students has allowed the state to build a robust infrastructure and a strong reputation in online education. The evolution includes expanding offerings to better serve both North Dakota residents and out-of-state learners, leveraging technology to enhance accessibility, and continuously improving program quality for all students. A strong online educational presence for ND institutions highlights the state's strategic foresight in recognizing the long-term value of online education for workforce development and economic growth.

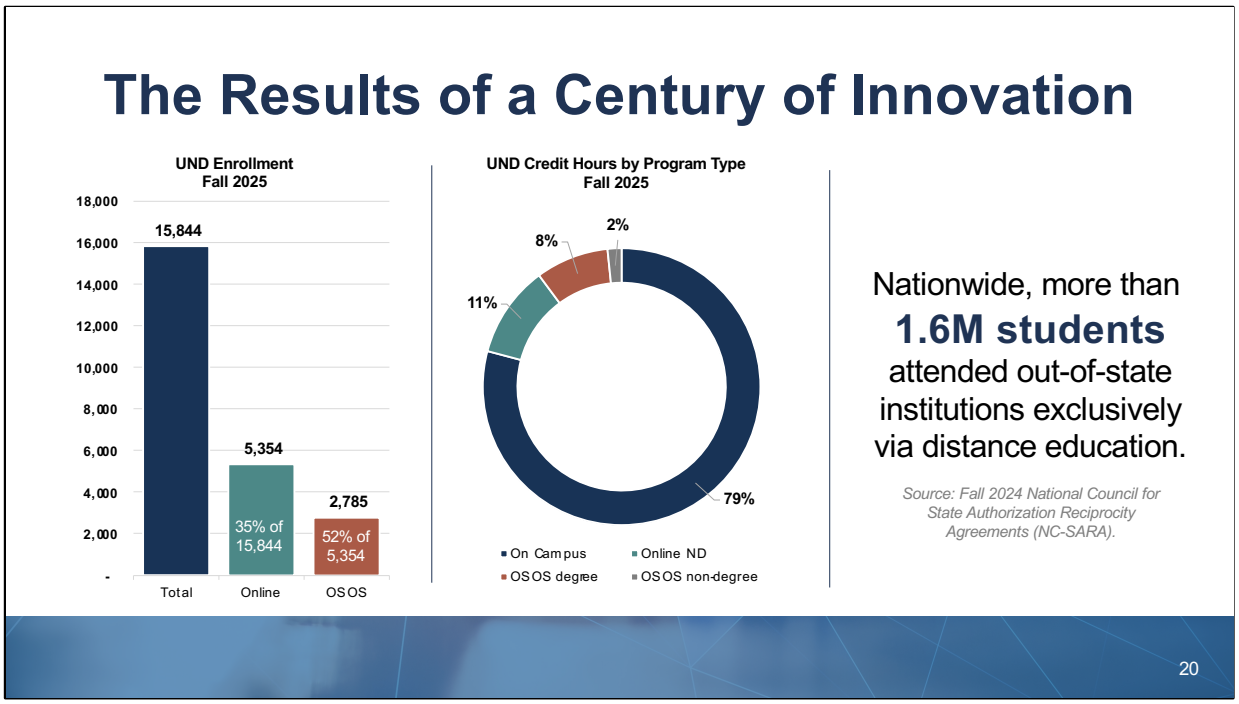
These programs not only address immediate workforce needs, but also position the state for long-term success. By attracting remote learners, ND can diversify its economy, strengthen its higher education institutions, and build a more resilient population base.

By continuing to innovate and expand its online offerings, North Dakota can ensure it remains competitive, inclusive, and future-ready in an increasingly digital world.


Questions
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Appendix
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UND UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA
UND TODAY
University of North Dakota's Official News Source
The North Dakota magnet of online education
October 30, 2025
blogs.und.edu
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UND Enrollment

Of UND's total enrollment of 15,844 students, this fall, 35% take some online classes, and just over a third — 5,354 students — study exclusively online.

Of the 5,354 students who are studying exclusively online, 2,785 or 52 percent are nonresidents.

The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements' (NC-SARA) most recent data set (Fall 2024) shows that more than **1.6 million students nationwide**, **up from 1.2 million in 2018**, attended out-of-state institutions exclusively via distance education.

This is a growing national market of students — and potential North Dakotans — that North Dakota can and should compete for.